More Than a Meal: Meals On Wheels Provides Nutrition Counseling, Medication Review for Home-bound Seniors

HomeMeds program helps reduce dizziness and falls for elderly and disabled

When most people think of Meals On Wheels (MOW), they think of a friendly volunteer dropping off a nutritious meal with a kind word and a smile. But in Tarrant County, Texas, (the Fort Worth area) MOW does more than deliver food — it provides nutrition and diabetic screenings, assessments, counseling and education for its clients. Another innovative program called HomeMeds allows certified pharmacy technicians to review clients’ medications. If an alert is noted, those are reviewed by a registered pharmacist. The goal of these programs is to prevent or reduce ER visits and hospitalizations.

Sherry Marishak-Simon is the Vice President of Nutrition and Health Programs for MOW of Tarrant County. She has more than 30 years of experience as a registered dietitian in numerous areas of dietetics, including clinical nutrition, food service management and senior nutrition programs.

Simon has been involved in developing and directing ground-breaking projects, which involve providing nutrition and diabetes education, as well as medication reviews, to seniors. Ideally, these programs have been developed to help seniors improve their self-management behaviors to control their diseases so that they can live more independently in their homes and avoid hospital utilization.

Besides working at MOW, Marishak-Simon is involved in many community organizations. She is currently on the Board of Directors for the Tarrant County Food Policy Council, a member of the Community Health Collaborative of the Dallas-Fort Worth Hospital Council Foundation and a member of the John Peter Smith Hospital CEO advisory committee.

In this interview, she shares information about why nutrition counseling and medication review are so vital to the people served by MOW.

Question: Unplanned readmissions continue to impact communities and disproportionately impact the underserved population. How is Meals on Wheels of Tarrant County addressing these issues?

Answer: Through a variety of programs, Meals On Wheels is providing daily contact with this underserved population by volunteers who deliver hot meals and a smile. Our case managers make at least quarterly visits to ensure that clients are receiving the support they need and make referrals to other agencies and organizations to help the client access other necessary services, such as transportation, utility help and basic necessities. Registered dietitians visit those clients at high risk of being malnourished or who are already malnourished, at high risk of developing diabetes or already have a diagnosis of diabetes, and/or
who have multiple chronic conditions to provide nutrition assessment and education, with the purpose of improving health outcomes and avoiding hospitalizations. Here are some details about how the program works:

- Nutrition risk screenings and diabetes risk screenings are completed during the initial visit by case managers and conducted yearly at follow-up appointments.
- All clients that are at least 35 years old and who take three or more medications will be contacted by the HomeMeds team to be entered into a national database software program (HomeMeds).
- Registered dietitians collect data during in-home visits for malnutrition risk, as well as information about daily activities and perceived confidence in management of health conditions. They identify and diagnose nutrition-related health problems to provide education and teach nutritional strategies to improve health outcomes. The dietitian will help the client set a SMART behavior goal to incorporate these strategies into their daily lives.
- Dietitians also assess for health literacy to guide learning needs and styles for client education. Each client then receives two follow-up phone calls addressing any issues with the above information and monitoring progress of SMART goals set by the client. High-risk clients are contacted for one follow-up visit by the dietitian to monitor progress and assess for any further goal-setting or educational needs.

**Question:** Medication errors and polypharmacy also impact readmissions. How does Meals on Wheels of Tarrant County address this?

**Answer:** The HomeMeds program is an evidence-based, in-home, medication review and intervention that includes a computerized risk assessment and alert process. A pharmacist reviews and makes recommendations for improvement.

Medications are a huge factor in readmissions and fall-related injuries. Adults 65 years or older are twice as likely as others to come to emergency departments for adverse drug events and nearly seven times more likely to be hospitalized after an emergency visit.

Once medications are entered into the HomeMeds database by our registered pharmacy technicians, alerts are generated for medications that either increase falls risk and dizziness, duplicate therapies or cause interactions. A pharmacist then reviews the alerts for each client and makes recommendations or encourages the client to contact their physician regarding specific medications or regimens.

**Question:** How are you measuring the impact of your program on hospital utilization and patient satisfaction?

**Answer:** The impact is measured by evidence-based assessment tools with data collected at program enrollment and again at six months of participation with the Registered Dietitians in the Healthy Aging for Independent Living program. We assess the general perception of health and number of healthy days in the last month. We also examine ED or hospital utilization in the last six months at the initial dietitian visit and again at the six-month point.

**Question:** What are some tools and resources that may help providers gain a better understanding?

**Answer:**

- **Diabetes Risk Screen** is from American Diabetes Association. Here is a link to the Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test from the American Diabetes Association: [http://www.diabetes.org/are-you-at-risk/diabetes-risk-test/](http://www.diabetes.org/are-you-at-risk/diabetes-risk-test/)
• **EQ5D Assessment** - Assesses quality of life and perceived confidence, can be found here: https://www(aaos.org/uploadedFiles/EQ5D3L.pdf

• **Mini Nutritional Assessment** (MNA) for risk of malnutrition, http://www.mna-elderly.com/forms/MNA_english.pdf
